

REFLECTIONS ON GLOBAL EDUCATION

Robert J. Moore

The fact that Canada had the longest boundary in the world with another state - and that state being the U.S.A. - makes us forget that she is really sandwiched between two nuclear super powers. Rather misleadingly, the Mercator's map of the world portrays the Northern part of Canada in icy isolation at the top of the world. More realistic interpretations of her location show the Soviet Union as our next door neighbour. That makes Canada the classic middle kingdom lying vulnerably between two short-tempered and combative nuclear Hercules.

But this condition of in-betweenity does not stop at her relations with the United States and the Soviet Union. Canada also lies between two economic giants: the United States inevitably and the European Economic Community: deeply competitive with each other in their trade policies however much they may agree on a broad interpretation of the way the world should look. That double state of in-betweenity heightens the vulnerability which is the continuing condition of Canada. Canadians, if they reflect upon it, are in the best position to understand the meaning of the word vulnerability in the context of the last two decades of this century. That understanding could be the beginning of a particularly Canadian form of wisdom. It gives them an excellent vantage point from which to see the world as it really is - a world in which all the peoples live in a state of mutual vulnerability. That, after all, is the real meaning of the much misunderstood and much abused word "interdependence".

It is at this point that global education really begins. Global Education, in other words, is the process by which our young people are awakened to the condition of mutual vulnerability of which now characterises the peoples of the globe.

Sound Global Education in the schools must embody at least three aims: first, a factual awareness of the world leading to an ability to interpret those facts; second the formation of values that turn awareness of the world into the sort of thoughtful action that contributes towards its stability and its increasing sense of justice. Third the kindling of the imagination so that resourcefulness becomes the parent of thoughtful action and enjoyment its companion.

These three characteristics of Global Education are vitally necessary for a fundamental reason: we are living at the end of an era. The Chinese have a famous curse: "May you live in interesting times" We are certainly doing that in the middle of the 1980's and the turbulence of our times suggests the need for thoughtful and imaginative reconstruction of the institutions we have thrown up and the creation of new ones to deal with the increasing interpenetration of the peoples of our global village.

More specifically, we are at the end of historical period in which it was assumed that spacious growth patterns of our Northern societies could be indefinitely prolonged. Secondly, that the societies of Africa, Latin America and Asia would achieve a reasonable degree of growth and prosperity once they followed the paths that we had trod. Thirdly, that the super powers would turn from the nuclear arms race to the commodities and services race, thus freeing us from preoccupation with mushroom clouds. Fourthly that nature, super-abundant eternally fertile and inexhaustible - would be able to sustain whatever batterings we imposed upon her, possessed, as she was supposed to be, of self-rectifying mechanisms which would ensure her continuing productivity in the face of our overuse or misuse of her resources. Behind all these four assumptions was the comfortable and comforting doctrine of inevitable progress - a hidden mechanism at the very center of things pushing us and our circumstances towards a consumer paradise, a world of diminishing poverty, fewer wars, greater international stability.

Instead of which, just to take one example, Chernabyl in Russia has shown us how vulnerable we are even without a nuclear holocaust. We are reminded day after day that we have not only to control nuclear weapons but equally nuclear waste. We are constantly being sobered into realizing that a globe bristling with arms, nuclear or non-nuclear, is too dangerous for our evolutionary future. In short, it is coming home to us - painfully - that human kind cannot go on living on the basis of a postponed Armageddon.

The tiff we had with the United States over the sale of our shingles and wood to them has reminded us how fragile is the world economy in which the leading economic power is so strongly tempted to protectionism - as are indeed other economic powers. But it tells us more: that the world economy is in grave danger of an epileptic convulsion. That we cannot think any longer merely of sectors of the world but of the whole world economy. Closer to home, we are beginning to realize that Canada needs economic stability because she is a trading nation (30¢ in every dollar comes from exports) just as she needs international stability because she is a vulnerable nation. And some of the world's most penetrating thinkers are also beginning to realize that international economic crises will not begin to resolve themselves until the Third World debt problem begins to be realistically tackled. Put that in other words and you come to this conclusion: the growth of Third World economies is more important to the stability of the Global Economic System than the repayment of Third World debts.

The mention of Third World debt brings us right back to our concern for peace. For as long as the weight of debt lies heavily on so many Third World countries their political feverishness will worsen. As their feverishness worsens so our fragile international stability is threatened. For one sure way to keep the two super powers exasperated with each other is for both of them to meddle in the explosive politics of certain Third World societies. In short, instability in the Third World is a ready trigger for continuous super power collision. For behind this instability is a pervasive feeling of impotence. All of which could be summed up in Mr. Trudeau's

little-remembered misquotation of a well known saying "Lack of power corrupts and an absolute lack of power corrupts absolutely". Applied to the debt-ridden condition of many Third World States one immediately sees how right that saying is.

If we want to achieve international stability, therefore, we have to educate our young people into the interrelationship between Third World economic health and global peace. If we can no longer believe that some hidden mechanism is guiding us to the broad sunlit uplands of peace and security than we must teach our young people that the future, the making of the future depends upon themselves - provided that they are well aware of what it is they are facing and are enabled by their educational system to tap their immense resources intellectual, spiritual and imaginative to face these problems and to surmount them.

Let us look at our global problems from a slightly different angle: the angle of population growth. It is a depressing thought that if our population growth continues the way it is doing now, then the world's population will increase by 2 billion in the next 25 years to add to the present level of nearly 5 billion. Almost all of the increase will be in the Developing World but that will affect us here in the North also. And for a good reason: the carrying capacity of our planet is threatened with breakdown under that kind of strain.

Our young people here in Canada need to know that the staggering rate of reproduction is due not only to the efficiency of modern medicine. Something more fundamental is at work here. It is summed in one word: insecurity. Yes, insecurity begets and absolute insecurity begets absolutely. When the traditional security networks of old societies begin to breakdown under the pressure of modernization; when the modern security networks of the new states begin to breakdown under economic pressure and debt repayment; when, to put in human terms, parents see no other way of securing some support in their old age except by the number of their children; when in short the only

kind of hope in a dark future is children - the very thing that may make the future darker - then population increases become dangerously high. But all of that brings us right back to our Global Economic System, to the immense burdens put on the fragile economies of Third World countries and to the fact that those burdens are nearly always passed on to the poor.

Passed on to the poor, yes. But passed on to the natural environment as well. And the natural environment in many parts of the world is now beginning to show distinct signs of collapse. We are, whether we want to recognize it or not, in the midst of a deep ecological crisis. But the contributors to that crisis are not just the poor of the earth; the rich too are making their own massive contribution. For we require from the earth far more than it can give without nurture. Instead of husbanding nature we seek constantly to exploit her proceeding blithely on the assumption that her own restorative powers are well in advance of our own cupidity. But nature is sending out unmistakable signals that she can no longer bear this determined pillage. In vast areas of the world the deserts are advancing; in other areas bodies of fresh water are turning acid. Soil is being washed down from mountain sides as trees are wantonly hewn down. Recently in one state in India a perfect human parable with a deep lesson was enacted. A band of women made a human chain around a coppice of trees to prevent them being cut down by a business cooperation to satisfy the avaricious hunger for paper. And here in Canada he have had examples of Indians in a certain province banding themselves to prevent loggers from cutting down the trees on their land. In fact the tree has become the internationally acknowledged symbol of the fragile as well as the restorative powers of nature. And so indeed it should be such in our schools where increasingly in their science lessons our young people should be taught about the finite capacity of our planet and the ways in which we have to care for the earth if it is going to remain a habitation for our species.

In view of all this, the question for our educational system is not whether we can at this stage afford global education but whether we can afford to go on without it. The crises through which we are living - nuclear, economic

ecological and demographic - tell us that the assumptions on which we based our lives during the last thirty years are no longer valid. We had to approach the world with a different set of values - values based on the understanding that we have to create new patterns of living, that we have to think globally, even when we act locally; and that we have to give greater priority to the art of cooperation and the skill of containing conflict.

Global education is not therefore nearly a way of adding another burden on teachers and students by requiring them to master more details about the world. It is rather a way of engaging our young to respond to the fundamental changes taking place in our global village with a new set of assumptions and values by which to make that global village habitable without constant threat of annihilation or collapse. Global education is not just a subject. It is a philosophical attitude that would permeate the subjects on the curriculum whether they be Social Studies, the Natural Sciences, Literature, Home Economics and all the other offerings on a modern Canadian school curriculum. To breathe into all the subjects a sense of the changing shape of the world and the way that shape will affect Canada is also to teach our young people that their jobs in Canada will depend on how well and how wisely they relate to those changes taking place beyond Canada. Global Education in schools will remind young Canadians that Canada requires peace in order to grow; stability in order to trade and the kind of diplomatic credibility which will empower her to persuade other middle powers like herself to join together to influence the world in the direction of creative reconstruction. It will be a good thing if our young people are constantly reminded of the following description of our country: Canada is a country bounded on the north by mystery, on the south by importunity and the east by history and on the west by the east. With boundaries like those she cannot merely be a North American nation looking inward but a globally minded nation constantly looking outward.